NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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No. 515 NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 10, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

THE PLOT OF THE POISONER

OR

NICK CARTER'S HAIRBREADTH ESCAPE

by THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

Nick arrived at the very edge of the precipice just in time to see Codman dive head downward and disappear like an arrow sprung from a bow.

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No. 515. NEW YORK, November 10, 1906. Price Five Cents.

THE PLOT OF THE POISONER;

OR,

Nick Carter's Hairbreadth Escape.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

CODMAN'S MYSTERIOUS ILLNESS.

It was the morning of the fifteenth of June.

Nick Carter was reading his paper and smoking his after-breakfast cigar when he was called to the telephone whereupon the following conversation took place. We give both sides of it here for the better understanding of those who read.

"Hello!" said Nick. "Who is it?"

"The first deputy commissioner of police," was the reply.

"Ah! Commissioner Waldo. How are you?"

"Nicely, thank you. How are you?"

"Never better. What can I do for you, commissioner?"

"Nothing especial; only an accident has occurred this morning of which I think you ought to be informed."

"Indeed! What was it?"

"It was you, was it not, who arrested Doctor Codman, the poisoner?"

"Yes. Has he made another escape?"

"Hardly that; but he was found in his cell this morning in almost a dying condition."

"Has he swallowed some of his own poisons, do you think?"

"That we don't know. The physician who has attended him thinks not; and, besides——"

"Yes."

"You know, do you not, that he was thoroughly searched before he was put into a cell?"

"Certainly. I superintended the search myself."

"Yes. That was my understanding of the matter. How thorough was that search, Carter?"

"As thorough as I could make it, knowing the man as well as I do. We stripped him entirely before we finished with him."

"And you are positive, I suppose, that he could have had no poisons concealed about him?"

"As positive as I could be."

"Then doubtless the physician who attended him is right, and the illness is due to natural causes."

"How does the physician diagnose the case, commissioner?"

"To be entirely frank with you, Carter, he does not diagnose the case very clearly. He admits himself that he does not. He says that there are many puzzling symptoms, but he seems to have no doubt that it will develop, during the day, into a form of acute Bright's."

"Humph!" said Nick. "What has been done with him?"

"He was removed to the hospital an hour ago."

"To the prison ward, I suppose."

"Certainly."

"Did you see the man yourself?"

"Yes."

"How were you impressed by his appearance, commissioner?"

"I thought him to be a very sick man, indeed."

"Has any person been to see him? Has he been permitted to see anybody at all?"

"He sent for a lawyer yesterday morning, I am told; the morning after his arrest."

"Were the two left alone together?"

"Not exactly."

"Just what do you mean by that expression?"

"I mean that they were not for an instant unobserved by the guard, although he remained far enough away from them so that he could not overhear what was said."

"But he kept his eyes upon them all the time?"

"He asserts that he did so; yes."

"And he saw nothing pass between them?"

"Nothing—so he says."

"And just what do you wish me to do?"

"I thought that possibly it would be well if you should go around to the hospital and take a look at the man."

"I will do so."

"All right. That is all, I believe, Carter."

"Shall you remain at headquarters during the forenoon, commissioner?"

"Yes."

"In that case I will call around to see you when I leave the hospital."

"All right. Thank you. I shall be glad if you will do so."

The detective replaced the receiver on the hook, and wheeled his chair around so that he faced his chief assistant, who was seated at the opposite side of the room.

"Chick," he said, "you heard one side of that conversation, didn't you?"

"Yes. And I can imagine quite well what the other side was."

"Good. Do you care to go around to the hospital with me?"

"Yes. I would like to do so."

The detective turned again to the telephone and ordered his automobile brought around at once. Then he said:

"Get yourself into some sort of disguise that will make you look like a medical student, Chick. I will rig myself out as a visiting physician. It will be just as well for our interview if Codman doesn't recognize us. The car will be here in about ten minutes."

Fifteen minutes later Nick and his assistant leaped into the car, and a few moments later they came to a stop in front of the residence of Doctor Stag, who was one of the leading physicians of New York City, if not *the* one.

"Stag," said the detective, as soon as he was admitted to the presence of the physician, "can I tear you away from your patients for half an hour or less?"

"Quite impossible, Carter. I'm sorry, but—well, it can't be done, that's all. What's up?"

"It's Codman," replied the detective.

"What! Again?"

"Yes."

"Has he escaped?"

"Not quite; but I think he is fixing to do it."

"Where is he?"

"At the hospital."

"What is the matter?"

"That is what I wanted you to tell me, doctor. The only physician who has attended him—and I don't yet know who that is—doesn't seem to quite know, although he talks about some form of acute Bright's."

"Does, eh? There is only one form of it, I think."

"I'd like to have you see Codman, doctor," insisted Nick.

Doctor Stag pondered a moment. Then he said:

"Wait until I see who is waiting." And he stepped into his reception-room.

He was absent several moments, and when he returned he wore his hat.

"Come along," he said. "I have begged half an hour from my patients. Get me back here as soon as possible, won't you?"

"Sure thing."

After the lapse of another ten minutes the automobile stopped in front of the hospital, and in three more, Nick, Chick, and Doctor Stag were standing beside the cot upon which the famous—or, rather, the infamous—Doctor Codman, known as the Poisoner, was lying.

The man appeared to be only semi-conscious.

He looked up at his visitors with heavy, unseeing eyes. The flush of fever was on his face. Only a glance was required to determine the fact that he was a very sick man.

Doctor Stag felt of his pulse; he listened to the beating of his heart; he looked at his tongue, took his temperature, and did a dozen other things which doctors do in the effort to diagnose a case.

He asked a few questions of the sick man, to some

of which he received intelligent replies and to many of which he did not; Nick and Chick remained discreetly in the background, studying the sick man the while.

At last Stag looked toward him and nodded, and after a moment more they withdrew.

Doctor Stag paused for a moment in the office where he held a short consultation with the house physician, and then again nodding toward the detective, they returned to the automobile, and the great physician was whirled rapidly back to his office.

But he found time on his way there to say to the detective.

"There is no doubt whatever, Carter, that Codman is a very sick man; nor is there the least doubt in my mind that his illness is due to natural causes."

"You don't think, then, that he has managed to swallow one of his own poisons?" asked the detective.

"If he has done so, there is not the slightest evidence of it."

"You feel quite positive about that?"

"Entirely so."

"How do you diagnose the case, doctor?"

"I don't diagnose it—yet. I shall return there, after my office hours, to make a thorough examination of the man. It was that subject that I was discussing with the house physician. I asked him if he would personally assist me."

"Which, of course, he was only too glad to do."

"Certainly."

"But at present you don't think that there is any Tommy rot about this, eh?"

"No; I do not."

"After you have made your second examination, will you call me up on the phone or drop in to see me and tell me about it?"

"Certainly. I will stop at your house—say about four or five this afternoon."

"All right. Thank you. I will expect you."

"I'll be there, Carter."

"And, in the meantime, you think that we need feel no anxiety about Codman?—about his escaping, I mean. It would be a good thing for himself and all concerned, if he would cash in and quit."

"I don't think that you need feel any present anxiety about the immediate happening of either event," replied the doctor.

"All right. With that assurance, I will be content."

After he left Doctor Stag at his door, Nick drove the machine directly to headquarters, but only to discover that the deputy commissioner had been unexpectedly called away; so he left a note for him in which he said that he would call again that evening, and returned to his home.

He did not leave the house again that day, and when five o'clock in the afternoon arrived it found him pacing the floor of his study, in deep thought, while he awaited the arrival of Doctor Stag.

But Doctor Stag did not come; and at seven o'clock a telegram arrived from him. It said:

"I have been compelled to defer that examination until to-morrow morning."

Nick crumpled the message in his hand and scowled. He had serious misgivings, although he did not voice them.

CHAPTER II.

THE DRUGGED TOBACCO.

Again the hour was immediately after breakfast; again Nick Carter and Chick were seated in the study; again the telephone-bell rang, and again it was the deputy commissioner at the other end of the wire.

"That you, Carter?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What do you think about it?"

"About what?"

"Codman."

"What about him?"

"He has disappeared."

"*What!*"

"It seems to be a fact."

"When did he go, and how did he get away?"

"We don't know when, and we don't know exactly how. All that we do know is that the two night attendants who have charge of that ward, awoke apparently from a sound sleep at, or near, daylight this morning, and they found that Codman's cot was empty. That is all that is known about the incident at present."

"What put them to sleep?"

"They don't know; or they insist that they do not."

"I will have a talk with them."

"Yes; I think you had better do that."

"They should be off duty now. Where can I find them?"

"Right here. I had them brought to me at once."

"All right. I'll be with you inside half an hour."

"By the way, Carter, you didn't call here last evening, as your note said you would do."

"There was apparently no necessity for it. Stag wired me that he would have to defer the examination he intended to make, until this morning, and he had assured me that I need have no misgivings about Codman; that he was a very sick man—and all that."

"Very good. Get down here as soon as you can, won't you?"

"I will start at once."

When the detective entered the office of the deputy commissioner somewhat later, he found the two attendants there awaiting him, and with a nod of greeting

to the commissioner, he began to question the men at once.

"How do you divide your time when you are on duty in the ward?" was the first question he asked, and he directed it toward the one who appeared to be the more intelligent of the two.

"I take the north end of the ward; my companion takes the south end," was the reply.

"You are both on duty all night?"

"Yes; from eight o'clock until six in the morning."

"There is a door of communication at each extremity of the ward, is there not?"

"Yes. When there is nothing to do I am seated at one of the doors. Morton is seated at the other one."

"You each make certain rounds during the night, do you not?"

"Every half-hour."

"Tell me how that is done."

"On the even hour I pass through the ward and inspect the occupant of every cot, or, rather, I inspect every cot which is occupied."

"I understand."

"Morton does the same at the half-hour."

"And while one of you is engaged in making the inspection, what is the other one about?"

"He is merely at his station at the door."

"Suppose one of the patients calls to you during the night; who responds?"

"If the call comes from my half of the ward, I respond; if it comes from Morton's, he attends to it."

"If I remember correctly, Codman's cot was located in your half of the ward."

"Yes."

"And not very far from your door."

"The third from the door, on the west side; yes, sir."

"Did he call you to his cot at all during the night?"

"No, sir."

"Were you called away from the door by any of the patients, during the night?"

"Several times."

"Could Codman have made his escape while you were responding to such a call, without your being aware of it?"

"Certainly not; and, besides, sir, you must remember that both doors are kept securely locked at all times, night and day."

"You and Morton both dropped asleep, did you not?"

"Yes, sir. I never did such a thing before in——"

"Never mind that. What time was it, do you suppose?"

"I don't know, sir; and I cannot imagine——"

"We haven't got to that yet. Reply to my questions, and don't volunteer remarks."

"Yes, sir."

"What time was it when you last observed Codman, on his cot?"

"One o'clock, sir."

"Are you positive about that?"

"I am."

Nick turned to Morton.

"What time was it when *you* last noticed Codman?" he asked.

"Half-past twelve, sir."

Nick returned to the other attendant.

"What was Codman's condition when you last noticed him, at one o'clock?" he asked.

"The same as it had been since he was brought there. He was apparently in a semi-stupor. I don't think his position or attitude was changed at all."

"What induced you to go to sleep?"

"I have not the most remote idea, sir. I really have not."

"And you, Morton?"

"I don't know any more about it than you do, sir," was the reply.

Nick returned to Masters—that was his name—again.

"What did you eat, or drink, during the night?" he asked sternly.

"Nothing, sir. Nothing at all."

"Is that the truth?"

"It is, and it applies to Morton as well as myself."

"Where were you when you dropped asleep?"

"Seated in my chair near the door."

"How long have you been a night attendant in that ward?"

"Four years, sir. Morton and I went there at the same time; within a week of each other."

"Do you think it was between one o'clock and half-past one when you dropped off to sleep, Masters?"

"I think it must have been then; yes, sir. Morton says that he remembers seeing me make my rounds at one o'clock, so he must have been affected at the same time I was."

"Did any one approach you at that time, or near that time?"

"No, sir."

"Did any one enter the ward from the outside during the night?"

"No, sir."

"Did anything that was at all unusual happen to you, or happen inside the ward, at any time before you dropped asleep?"

"No, sir."

"You say you were called to one or another of the cots several times during the first part of the night?"

"Yes."

"Did you take anything, or swallow anything at all at any time between eight o'clock and one o'clock?"

"Not a blessed thing, sir. And Morton says the same."

Nick studied the man narrowly for a few moments; then he said:

"I observe that you chew tobacco."

"Yes. It helps to pass the time; and, of course, we cannot smoke on duty."

"Does Morton also chew?"

"Yes."

"What kind of tobacco do you chew?"

"Plug. Usually I chew a brand that is called Honeycomb, but I remember now that I tried a new kind last night."

Nick Carter was instantly interested.

"How did that happen?" he asked.

"Well, sir, it was this way—though I don't see——"

"You don't have to see. Just tell me exactly how it happened that you tried a new brand of chewing tobacco last night. Men who chew tobacco usually stick to their favorite brand, and are not given to making experiments with others."

"That is quite true, sir."

"I know it is. Now explain, if you please."

"Well, sir, I usually get around to the hospital about six. I have some trifling things to attend to before I go on duty."

"Well?"

"It was a quarter to eight last night when I suddenly discovered that I didn't have enough tobacco to last me through the night, so I left the hospital and ran to the corner, where I am in the habit of buying it, to get some. When I got there the man who keeps the place says to me, 'Masters, I've got a new brand here to-night that they tell me is fine. I wish you would give it a try.'

"'I like my own kind best,' says I; but he up and tells me that he will make me a present of a couple of plugs if I will try it; and he reaches into a box on the shelf and puts two plugs in front of me.

"Well, sir, I ain't none too flush with money, so I thanks him, takes the plugs, and walks out, but I happened to have a chew in my mouth at the time, so I didn't take any just then. In fact, I forgot all about it until along some time in the night, when my own supply gave out. It was then that I remembered the two plugs that had been given to me. Oh, I remember now exactly how it happened."

"How was that?" asked Nick.

"Morton came across to my end of the ward and asked me for a chew, his own being out, he said. I told him about the new kind and gave him one of the plugs. He bit off a chew of it and went back to his own end of the ward."

"Do you remember when that happened, Morton?" asked the detective sharply.

"Yes, sir. When I was making my half-past twelve inspection."

"Good! We are getting at it now. When did *you* take a chew of the new kind of tobacco, Masters?"

"It was some time after that, sir. I think, now that you call my attention to it, that it was when I started on my one-o'clock round."

"Precisely," said Nick. "The mystery is explained. The tobacco that was given to you was drugged. Nothing could be simpler. Commissioner, I wish you would send a detective sergeant to that tobacconist and have him brought here without delay, will you?"

"I certainly will;" and the commissioner pressed an electric-button and gave the order.

"And have the sergeant bring that box of plug tobacco along with him, please," said Nick.

CHAPTER III.

NICK CARTER'S CLEVER REASONING.

"Now, Masters," said the detective, "we have discovered how it was that you were drugged; and now I will ask you a few more questions."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you remember to have talked with a stranger, yesterday afternoon or evening, before you went on duty?"

"Let me see. Yes, I think I did. Just one."

"When and where was that?"

"It was while I was on my way to the hospital. I dropped into a beer saloon, where I am in the habit of going, to get a glass of beer, and, while I was standing at the bar talking with the proprietor, a stranger came into the place. He stepped up to the bar and ordered a beer, and, as he did so, he asked the boss to take something, and, seeing me there, he included me in the invitation. I accepted. That was all. He was the only stranger with whom I exchanged a word."

"Do you remember if you took a chew of tobacco while you stood there?"

"Yes, I did; and now that you remind me of it, the stranger asked me for a chew, and I remember now that we had some talk about tobacco at the time, too. Say! It's mighty funny, and I had clean forgotten it; but now I remember that he mentioned the very brand which that dealer afterward gave me, as being his favorite chew. He advised me to try it if I had a chance. I had clean forgotten it."

"Didn't you recall that conversation when the dealer gave you the two plugs?"

"Yes; I think I did remember it. I think that was one reason why I accepted it."

"Didn't the stranger ask you to try some at the time you were in the saloon?"

"No; he didn't have any. He was out. That was why he asked me for a chew."

"No; that was not the reason why. He asked you for a chew because he wanted to see what sort of a supply you had in your pocket."

"Eh?"

"He wished to figure out in his own mind just about how long your own supply would last, so that he could tell at about what time you would tackle a new plug, if you had one."

"By the great boot in Chatham Street, sir, I——"

"That will do for that. We will stick to our text; and, besides, the great boot in Chatham Street hasn't been there for twenty years," said Nick, with a smile. "The whole game is very clear to me now."

"Tell me how you figure it out, Carter," interposed the commissioner; and the two attendants stared, for neither had known until that moment that they were talking to Nick Carter.

"This way, commissioner," replied Nick. "Tobacco chewers, the world over, have certain habits which I have noticed are common to all of them. One of those habits is that they never bite into a new plug until the old one is consumed."

"That is true, sir," Masters interjected.

"The man who asked Masters for a chew, in the saloon, knew that perfectly well. His object in asking for the chew was to discover how much tobacco Masters had on hand."

"He might have had an extra plug in his pocket," said the commissioner.

"True enough; but that would have made no difference, for, if Masters had had half a dozen plugs of his own kind of tobacco in his pocket, and were given a plug of another kind to try, he would make the trial before he bit into a fresh plug of his own, and he would *not* make the trial until he had finished the plug that was already more than half consumed."

"Do *you* chew tobacco, Mr. Carter?" asked Masters.

"No; but I know several persons who do."

"Well, you are dead right about their peculiar habits."

"I know I am. Now, commissioner, when the stranger saw that Masters had about a half or a third of a plug of his own kind, left in his pocket, he instantly figured it out that if he was given a new kind, he would bite off a chew from it some time during the night. He would get to the new plug at some time between midnight and dawn. See?"

"Yes. I understand. But what about Morton? Did you see any stranger, Morton, or have any tobacco conversation with anybody?"

"No, sir."

The commissioner turned again to the detective.

"What about Morton?" he repeated.

"It was not at all necessary that the stranger should know anything about Morton's supply," replied Nick. "It is only a coincidence that his supply gave out and that he crossed the room to ask Masters for a chew."

"I don't follow you at all."

"The fact is this: If his supply had not given out—if he had not crossed the room and asked for a chew, Masters would have gone over to him when he tried the new plug, and have asked him to give it a try also. Isn't that right, Masters?"

"As sure as you are alive, sir."

"He would want another opinion than his own; and, besides, he had had two plugs given to him; it is more than likely that he would have passed one of them on to Morton, in any event, for the two men are friends, and, I have no doubt, often borrow a chew of one another."

"You're dead right, Mr. Carter," said Masters. "That is exactly what I would have done."

"Is it all clear to you now, commissioner?" asked Nick.

"Yes; only it strikes me as being rather far-fetched."

"I don't think so. It is merely the result of a careful study of human nature. Masters, have you that plug of tobacco here with you now?"

"Yes. Here it is."

"Have you used any more of it? But I see you have not."

"No; I didn't like it at all. There is a bitter taste to it which I don't like. I was about to take a bite out of it a little while ago, but I happened to be passing a cigar-store at the time so I went in and got some of my own kind."

"How about you, Morton?" asked Nick.

"One chew of it was enough for me. It is too bitter. Tastes like hog weed to me."

"Well, it is lucky that you have not tried it again. You would both be asleep now, if you had done so. Now, Masters?"

"Yes, sir."

"What time did you wake up?"

"Just at daylight."

"That would be about four o'clock, or a little after."

"Just about four, sir."

"Did you feel badly?"

"No, sir. Just as usual."

"It did not occur to you that you had been drugged?"

"Not at all."

"How soon did you discover the absence of Codman?"

"It was Morton who made the discovery, sir, although Codman was nearest to my station. You see, he woke up a minute or two before I did, and I opened my eyes just as he was coming toward me on a run. His face was pale and he looked scared, and it brought me up standing. I asked him what was the matter, and he told me that his door was unlocked, that the key was in the

lock—and then, of a sudden, he pointed to Codman's bed."

"It was empty, of course."

"Yes, sir."

"How did Codman get out of the building?"

"Just nacherly walked out, sir."

"How was that?"

"The night watchman at the door will tell you that the man came to him, fully dressed, and demanded to be let out. He said very plainly that he was Doctor Codman, of Stoneyhedge Court, and that he had been detained in the hospital by a patient who was in a private room. He looked like a doctor——"

"He is a doctor."

"He looked like a doctor, and he gave the watchman one of his engraved cards. The watchman let him out and thought no more about it. He doesn't even remember what time it was, for he didn't look to see."

The detective turned to the commissioner again.

"You can understand how that was done?" he asked.

"Perfectly. I don't think that any real blame attaches to the watchman. The puzzle is, how did Codman secure his clothing?"

"That was easy," replied Nick. "Codman has been for a long time a practising physician in New York City. I have no doubt that the interior of that hospital is as familiar to him as the inside of his own house, or office. He would know exactly where his clothing had been put—and the rest was easy."

"But the man was sick almost unto death. He was lying in a half-stupor," remonstrated the commissioner.

"That was probably simulated," said Nick.

"Could he simulate it well enough to fool a man like Stag?"

"It appears that he *did* do it; or else he knew how to obtain access to the medicine-closet and knew also that there was a drug there which was an antidote to the poison he had taken. We will never know the full explanation of what has happened until Codman is recaptured, commissioner."

"And not even then, unless he chooses to tell us."

"Oh, he will tell, all right. Trust his egotism for that."

"Anyhow, we haven't recaptured him yet."

"No," said Nick slowly; "but we will."

"For the present, at least, he has disappeared, Carter."

"Quite so; and the first reappearance he will make will not be far from the spot where he concealed his mechanical giant. You remember about that, don't you? How he has manufactured, from aluminum, a giant that is eight feet tall, and how he gets himself inside it and makes it walk and run and do things exactly as if it were alive?"

"Yes, I heard a lot about it; but I did not believe half that I heard."

"Well, you may believe it—all. The thing is so perfectly and so wonderfully made that it fooled even me for a time. I thought at first that it was alive; then I thought it was made of marble, and it was not until later that I discovered what it really is."

"It escaped you all the same, didn't it?"

"Yes. He managed to conceal it somewhere so that we could not find it."

"Well, Carter, don't you think that if it is your opinion that Codman will go directly after his giant, somebody should be sent to that neighborhood at once to watch out for him?"

"I have already attended to that," replied Nick.

"You have?"

"Yes; all three of my assistants have gone there—and they should be almost there by this time."

"Good! I only hope that they will catch him. The escape reflects upon the department, Carter, in a way that is annoying; extremely so, in fact."

"Oh, we'll catch him," said Nick. "My only fear is——" He paused.

"What?"

"That his later experiences will have a bad effect upon his temper. I am afraid that he will be inclined to cut loose, now. You see, up to the present time, he has not committed any very serious crime that we know about. He has only made what we call attempts; but now, he realizes that he is a hunted man—that every hand is against him, *and I am afraid that he will do things.*"

What the commissioner might have said in reply is not known, for at that moment the sergeant, who had been sent after the tobacconist, returned with him in tow; and a more genuinely frightened man it would have been hard to find.

CHAPTER IV.

CODMAN'S PLOT TO ESCAPE LAID BARE.

"Sit there," said Nick Carter to the tobacconist. "What is your name?"

"Poacher, sir. Samuel Poacher."

"What is that you have in your hands?"

"The box of tobacco, sir, that you ordered me to bring here."

"The same box from which you presented two plugs to Mr. Masters, yesterday?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many plugs have been taken from the box altogether?"

"Only three, sir."

"Who received the third?"

"I took it myself, sir. I only took one chew from it, just as I was closing up, last night."

"Did you sleep soundly?"

"I should say I did, sir. I sleep in the little room back of my store, and I woke up this morning about daylight, on top of the bed, with my clothes all on me. I didn't even stop to undress."

"Are you telling me the truth, Poacher?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you get that box of tobacco?"

"A man came into my store about seven o'clock last night, who said he was the agent for it. He wanted to sell me the box, but I told him I had all the supply I wanted. Then he said as how it was a very fine and high-priced brand, and that I ought to have it. I still said I didn't want it, and then he told me that he was broke, and said that I could have the whole box for fifty cents, so I took it."

"Describe the man's appearance," said Nick.

"Well, sir, he was about as tall as you. He had red hair and watery eyes and a bristling, red mustache. He wore a blue serge coat, and——"

"Is that the man, Masters?" interrupted Nick.

"Yes, sir; that's him, all right."

"How did you happen to give two plugs of that particular tobacco to Mr. Masters?" the detective demanded sternly of Poacher.

"There wasn't any particular reason, sir. Mr. Masters is a good customer of mine, and I felt that I could afford to, seeing as how the whole box only cost me fifty cents. He wanted some tobacco, and I thought if I could get him to chewing that box of it, I would more than get my money back. Chewers don't take kindly to new tobacco, but I knew that Morton would chew what Masters did, and so——"

"That will do. Are you quite sure that the man who left the tobacco there said nothing to you about Masters?"

"He didn't say a word about anybody; but I do remember one thing about him."

"You do, eh? What was that?"

"Why, he came into the store a second time, a few minutes after Masters went out."

"What did he want then?"

"He wanted to buy back that box of tobacco; said he had struck a raise since he was in before and that he really couldn't afford to let the tobacco go so cheap. He offered me a dollar for it, and finally two dollars; but I wouldn't have it. I thought if it was such a good thing I had better hang on to it."

"What else?"

"He said he was sorry. He also asked me if I chewed, and when I said that I did, sometimes, he advised me to try some of it myself before I went to bed. He told me to take a chew of it when I closed up, just to see how I liked it."

"Anything more?"

"No; only what he said about Masters."

"What was that?"

"You see, he came in right after Masters went out, and so, after a little, he asked who that man was who had just gone out."

"Well?"

"I told him, and he shook his head, saying it couldn't be the one. Then he explained that he thought he had recognized him, but he was mistaken. Then he leaned over the counter and remarked that two plugs were gone from the box, and I told him that I had given Masters two of the plugs; one for himself and one for a friend of his'n."

"Anything more?"

"Nothing, only that he asked me, carelesslike, if Masters had bought any other tobacco."

"You told him that he had not, of course?"

"Certainly."

"And then——?"

"Then he went away. I haven't seen him since."

"I think that is all, Mr. Poacher. You may go now; but you may leave that box of tobacco here."

"I hope that I am in no trouble, sir."

"No; but you came mighty close to it. My advice to you is not to accept any more goods in the manner in which you became possessed of this."

"You bet your life I won't. Whatever has happened I can't imagine, but, whatever it is, I meant no harm, sir."

"I can see that quite plainly. You may go now."

When he had gone, Nick turned again to Masters.

"You see," he said, "that your friend of the saloon hurried to that store where he knew you supplied yourself with tobacco, the moment you parted. Then, after he had persuaded Poacher to take the box, he remained near there, watching to see if you would get some of it. He was probably looking in through the window when you did get it, and when you came out he attempted to buy the box back again so that the whole neighborhood would not be drugged. Afterward, inasmuch as he remembered the size of your partly consumed plug, he was able to figure out, with some degree of accuracy, about the time when you might be expected to go to sleep.

"That, I think, is the whole story, commissioner," continued the detective, "save that the red-headed man of the tobacco plot was doubtless waiting outside the hospital, with some sort of conveyance at hand, when Codman appeared."

"But how was it possible for all the details of this plot to be arranged. Codman has not been permitted to see anybody."

"You told me over the phone that he had seen a lawyer."

"Oh, yes. But a reputable lawyer would not lend himself to anything of this kind."

"Do you know that he *was* a reputable lawyer?"

"No; to tell you the truth I do not."

"Do you know, in fact, that he was a lawyer at all?"

"I have only the turnkey's word for it, of course, although I have seen a card that he left behind him. Stay, I think I have it here."

He searched among the papers on his desk and presently passed a card over to the detective.

"Sol Solmenstein, Attorney and Councellor at Law, 256 Broadway, New York City," the detective read aloud. "That seems to be straight enough on the face of it. Let me have your telephone directory for a moment, commissioner."

It was passed to him, and presently he said:

"At least, he has no telephone."

He turned then to the instrument and asked the information bureau to give him the telephone number of that address on Broadway, after which he called it up and asked for the superintendent of the building.

The answer came presently, and then Nick asked:

"Is there a lawyer in your building, who either has an office or desk-room there, whose name is Sol Solmenstein?"

"No, sir," came the instant reply. "There is only one lawyer in the entire building, and he is a patent lawyer, named Brown."

"You don't happen to know about a man with the name I have inquired about, do you?"

"No, sir. Never heard the name before."

Nick thanked him, hung up the receiver, and called for the city directory, only to find that it did not contain the name Solmenstein at all.

"You see," he said to the commissioner, putting it aside, "Codman fooled you. Instead of sending for a lawyer, he sent for one of his confederates, and, doubtless, notwithstanding the fact that they were watched, the man who called himself Solmenstein managed to bring him the drug he used in his pretended illness."

"Yes; I see it all now—when it is too late," was the reply.

"You must not forget, commissioner, that it is no mistake of yours. You did not attend to this matter personally."

"That is quite true."

"I haven't any doubt," continued the detective, "that Sol Solmenstein and the man who borrowed a chew of tobacco from Masters, are one and the same."

"Does that bring us any nearer to a solution of the present problem?" asked the commissioner.

"No. I wish you would send down-stairs for the man who was watching when that interview took place, however."

He was sent for, and presently appeared.

"Do you happen to know a lawyer named Sol Solmenstein?" asked Nick, at once.

"Yes, sir. That is, I don't exactly know him; I have seen him once. He came here to see a Doctor Codman. I watched them while they were talking."

"Had you ever seen the man before, or have you seen him since that time?" asked Nick.

"No, sir."

"Did you hear anything that was said between the two men at the interview?"

"Not a word, sir."

"Did you watch them closely?"

"Never took my eyes off'n them an instant."

"Did you see anything pass between them?"

"Only a lead pencil."

"How was that? Tell me exactly how it happened."

"The lawyer evidently was without a pencil, for he appeared to ask the doctor for one; anyhow, he took one from his vest pocket and gave it to the lawyer. Then the lawyer made some notes with it on the back of an envelope. He had to sharpen it, too, before he did it. I remember that, because he took out his knife and crossed the room to where it was lighter while he sharpened it."

"I suppose his back was toward you while he was doing that, wasn't it?"

"I think it was—partly; yes, sir," replied the man, with some surprise in his voice; and then he hastened to add:

"But the two men were nowhere near together at the time."

"Certainly not. Did the lawyer return the pencil to the doctor when he was through with it?"

"He did."

"You see now how it was done, commissioner," said the detective, with a smile.

"What kind of a pencil was it?" asked the commissioner of the officer.

"A silver pencil. The kind that you screw on to make the lead come out."

"Then why did he have to sharpen it?"

"I don't know that. It didn't occur to me."

Nick laughed.

"Officer," he said, "he did not sharpen the pencil at all. He simply unscrewed the top so that he could drop a few pellets inside the tube; and those few pellets have been the means of permitting the prisoner to escape."

CHAPTER V.

THE PRISONER SETS A TRAP.

When Nick Carter reached his home after parting with the commissioner, he found that Doctor Stag was awaiting him, and that he was somewhat excited.

"Look here, Carter," he exclaimed, as soon as Nick entered the house, "what the devil has happened?"

"Suppose you tell me, doctor," replied the detective,

... a smile. "Something seems to have happened to ..."

"Something has."

"What is it?"

"This;" and the doctor extended his hand, which contained a letter.

"Read it," he said; and Nick slowly drew it from the envelope and did so.

If he experienced any surprise he did not show it; and, presently, he replaced it in the envelope and deposited it in his own pocket instead of returning it to the doctor.

"I will keep it if you don't mind," he said.

"Not at all. I am quite willing that you should keep it. But what does it mean?"

"Chican made his escape from the hospital last night, sir. He succeeded in fooling everybody, not excepting the great Doctor Stag; and, the fact that he *did* fool him has made him so elated that he could not resist the impulse to write you a letter and tell you about it. I think, too, that he wrote it."

"Why? Because it makes an ass of me?"

"Yes; but because it proves that he is one himself. In giving written one letter, he will presently write others. Letter writing is the besetting weakness of educated criminals. They can no more resist the impulse to do it, than they are started on that road, than a pretty woman can resist the desire to glance into a mirror when she passes one. When did you receive it?"

"Half an hour ago."

"There is no stamp or postmark upon it. How did it come to you?"

"It was left at the door by a woman—at least, so my valet said."

"By a woman, eh? The poison doctor has a sister, I remember. She calls herself Jane Gore. I wonder if it was she who delivered it?"

"I don't know. I would not know even if I had seen her, which I did not."

Nick produced the letter from his pocket again and read it aloud:

"'DEAR DOCTOR STAG,'" he read. "'I am so grateful to you for not being any wiser than you are. I wonder whether you earned all that reputation that is yours; and I wonder also if you have discovered yet how thoroughly I fooled you. Excuse me, I forgot myself. But I must take this opportunity of informing you that my escape, as you saw it, was brought about entirely by the use of a little pellet which I alone know how to manufacture, a few of which a friend of mine very cleverly secreted in the shank of a silver pencil I carry—and which, by the way, was thoroughly searched when I was first made a prisoner. I will add, also, for your further information, that the drug, aforesaid, does not impair one's strength at all; the effect of it is only and solely in the appearance of the patient. It is possible that some time I may have an opportunity to give you a few lessons in the profession of which so many deluded persons believe you to be a master. CODMAN.'"

"Nice letter, isn't it?" said the doctor, gritting his teeth.

"Beautiful," replied Nick, smiling.

"I'd like to have him tied down upon a dissecting-table," muttered the physician.

"What! Alive?"

"Yes, alive."

"I am afraid, doctor, if such a thing should occur, you would do a worse thing than to cut him up while he was alive."

"What would that be, pray?"

"You would cut him loose. Your heart is much too tender to do anything else."

"Well, maybe it is. Anyhow, I thought you would like to see that letter. I was just getting ready to go around to the hospital when it came."

"It is a pity that you did not conduct that examination last night, as you intended to do doctor," said Nick.

"I couldn't, so there is no use in regretting it. Did he get clean away?"

"Yes."

"Then it's dollars to doughnuts that he'll make directly for that mechanical giant of his, isn't it?"

"I think so; but I have already sent my assistants to watch the woods where we think he concealed it."

"That's good; and that cabin he had in the forest, too?"

"No; but Chick will think of that; or Ten-Ichi will."

"What are you going to do, Nick?"

"I? I am going to recapture Doctor Codman—and I think when I have accomplished it, that I will sit on him until he is tried and convicted."

"That wouldn't be a bad idea, either. You will just about have to do something of that sort in order to hold him."

"It would appear so, doctor."

"You don't suppose that he would have gall enough to go again to his own office, like he did that other time, do you?" asked the doctor.

The detective bounded to his feet.

"By Jove, Stag!" he said; "that isn't at all a bad suggestion. I wish I had thought of it sooner. More than likely there are a lot of things there that he would like to have. Do you care to go up there with me?"

"You bet I do! I particularly want to see the inside of that office. I'll go."

"All right. Chick and the boys have got the automobile, but we will take the subway."

When they arrived at Stoneyhedge Court, where Codman had maintained an office, Nick went at once to the superintendent of the building and inquired if Doctor Codman had been there.

"No, sir," replied the man. "The doctor has been

arrested for something. He is in prison. I saw it in the papers, yesterday."

"But he has escaped," said Nick. "I did not know but that he might have been here."

"If he has been here, I don't know it."

"Do you lock the front door at night?"

"Yes, sir; at one o'clock. But Doctor Codman has a night key. He could come in at any old time he wanted to."

"Have you such a thing as a pass-key to his office? But first, does he still retain the offices?"

"Yes, sir. His rent is paid a year in advance."

"And that negro who worked for him—is he here?"

"No, sir. He hasn't been here since—I think it was the day before yesterday."

"Very well. Now, have you a pass-key to the offices?"

"No, sir. Doctor Codman had a new Yale lock put on the door as soon as he took possession, and only he and the nigger had a key to it."

"Isn't there any way by which you can get into those rooms?"

"No, sir."

Nick crossed the entrance hall to the door of the doctor's office—it was on the ground floor—and turned the knob.

To his astonishment the door opened at once, and the detective turned and motioned to Stag to follow him; but the superintendent interposed.

"I can't let you go in there," he said, "even if the doctor is under a cloud just now. It is his private office, and it is in my charge. It's all the same to me whether he is in prison or only out of town."

"But I am an officer," said Nick.

"That, sir, makes no difference to me, unless you have a search warrant. If you've got that, well and good; if you haven't, you can't go inside."

The detective looked the superintendent in the eye for a moment, and, seeing that he was in earnest, he made as if to abandon the idea.

He seemed about to turn away, but in reality he moved only a step or two when his hand shot out, he seized the superintendent by the throat, and, before that individual was aware of what had happened, Nick had forced him through the doorway into the office, and seated him rather roughly in a convenient chair.

Nick clapped a pair of handcuffs upon him, and with a second pair fastened him to the chair. Then he said:

"Now, my friend, I mean no harm. I am not going to steal anything, or get you into any trouble; but I *am* going to search these offices. As long as you sit there quietly, no harm will come to you, but if you attempt to call out, or to make any disturbance, I'll either gag you or knock you on the head—whichever seems the best course to me."

They left him in the outer office then and proceeded to the inner one; that which Codman had used as a private office. Beyond this, at one side, there was a bathroom; at the other side a sleeping-room.

The detective should have been warned by the ease with which he had gained access to the place, for, if he had but stopped to think of it, it was not at all like Codman to go away and neglect to spring the latch on his spring-lock so that the door would be fastened after him.

In fact, if Nick had stopped to reason the thing out at all, he would have thought it extremely unlikely that Codman would have entered his offices at all under the circumstances, and have left the door unlocked behind him.

But for once Nick neglected his usual caution.

He was so intent upon making an examination of Codman's quarters, that he forgot all else for the nonce.

The private office was not unlike other private offices of physicians, save that it was rather more plentifully supplied with apparatus of various kind, the uses of which Nick had not the least idea.

Neither, for that matter, had Doctor Stag; at least, in reference to many of them; but he gazed at them with interest, nevertheless.

But Stag gave the mechanical contrivances only a cursory examination. There were other things there that interested him more.

Along one side of the room was a row of shelves which looked as if it had been purloined from some drug-store, and upon the shelves was row after row of bottles; and what interested Doctor Stag the most was that every one of these bottles bore a label that had been filled out with a cabalistic sign of which he could make no meaning.

At last he resorted to the expedient of taking the bottles down one by one and smelling of the contents, after which he would either nod or shake his head in doubt, depending upon his recognition or non-recognition of the substance it contained.

During this proceeding Nick was at Codman's desk, searching among the papers for anything which might be of value to him; but all the time he also kept Doctor Stag in view, raising his eyes from his own occupation from time to time.

The doctor was still busily engaged with the drugs when Nick finished his task at the desk, having discovered nothing, and there being a large safe in one corner of the room, the detective rose from the chair and crossed to it.

He stood looking at it for a moment, and then reached forward to turn the handle, to see if it were locked.

To his surprise it was not fastened. The handle turned readily enough—and again he should have been warned, but he was not.

He had started to pull it open, and had moved it the

of an inch when he heard a cry of agony from Stag.

started back and half-turned when he heard the thud as the stricken man collapsed upon the floor; but he saw no more than that, for, in turning, he had pulled the door ajar, and the act was instantly followed by a terrific explosion which hurled Nick Carter across the room, and brought the plastered ceiling tumbling on top of him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WORK OF A HUMAN FIEND.

The first effect of an explosion of any kind is always paralyzing, no matter what the consequences of it may have been; then the reaction comes, and everybody within hearing rushes to discover what has happened.

If, in the present instance, Doctor Stag had not called out, thus attracting the attention of the detective and causing him to turn before he had entirely opened the door of the safe, Nick Carter must inevitably have been killed.

As it was, that cry of agony had proceeded from Stag just in time to save Nick's life.

Now it was the opening of the door of the safe that had brought about the explosion, and, had the detective stood squarely in front of it and pulled it wide ajar with the sudden motion with which a man is apt to open a heavy iron door, the edge and face of broken glass, and other missiles of which the infernal machine was made was composed, must have found his body and killed him.

But, as it was, he had not pulled the door open more than a foot.

It is true that that much had been sufficient to operate the mechanism of the infernal machine, but the angle of the door itself acted as a shield for the detective, and the deadly missiles inside the safe, coming in contact with it, were turned aside and so thrown in a glancing direction against the walls of the room.

Not one of them touched Nick Carter, and, although he was hurled across the room by the force of the concussion, he was not injured at all; only dazed, and that only for a moment.

Part of the ceiling came tumbling down into the room, and from it arose a dust that was both blinding and suffocating.

But Nick recovered himself in a moment, and, leaping through, he seized the fallen and carried him out to the hallway of the building where he placed him on a comfortable couch, while he removed the unconscious man to the building, who was still insensible to the shock in the office, and who had quickly turned from ghastly pale to

In the meantime, half a hundred persons had gathered around them, and among them a policeman who had heard the noise from the street, and who had hastened into the house to find out what was the matter.

To the officer Nick at once made himself known, directing him to keep the crowd back and to disperse it as quickly as he could; and then he gave his whole attention to Doctor Stag.

Stag was unconscious, but he was breathing, and so another doctor was sent for to look after him.

He came almost at once, for he lived next door, and, as soon as he arrived, the detective left Stag in his care and returned to the offices of Codman, having directed the policeman to permit nobody to follow him.

Of course, he understood now the significance of the unlocked office door and the unfastened safe.

It was all a part of a clever trap which Codman had set for him—for Nick Carter.

He had remembered that on the occasion of his former escape from the officers of the law the detective had sought him at his office in Stoneyhedge Court, and, doubtless, he had believed that Nick would do it again.

The manner in which Nick figured it out was this:

Codman had realized that now he must keep away from his old office for good and all, and so, immediately after his escape from the hospital, he had gone at once to the office to get such articles and drugs of which he stood in need, and, in leaving it, he had left the way wide open to the trap he had set while there.

He had had only to arrange his infernal machine, place it inside the safe, and connect it with the safe door in such a manner that the mere opening of the door would explode it; and, doubtless, he had argued that even if Nick Carter were not killed, he would receive a warning that he would not soon forget.

Concerning what had happened to Stag, Nick was as much in the dark as could be, save only that the doctor had inhaled one of Codman's mysterious concoctions.

But now, knowing that Stag was in good hands, he bent his attention to a further examination of the rooms.

There was, however, nothing to be found anywhere that was of the slightest value to him.

He had abandoned the inner office, and returned to the outer one, when he discovered an iron box that stood upon the table in that room.

It was much the same sort of box that express messengers use on trains, only smaller, and Nick stepped forward and raised the lid.

There was a single article inside—an unsealed envelope, addressed to himself, which contained a folded sheet of paper.

The detective smiled grimly when he discovered it.

"So," he said to himself, "I was not mistaken. Codman has caught the malady; he has begun to write letters. It will be interesting to see what this one contains."

Then he opened it and read:

"I have just a few words for you, Carter, if you should happen to live to read this; if not, others will find it, and it may serve as a warning to them, as it might—in the event of your death from the explosion which will follow when you open the safe—have done for you. I am tired of your persecutions. I am at the end of my patience. I am outlawed. I am hunted, and all because of your activity against me. This is a warning to you. Thus far I have not committed any very serious crime—at least, none that you know about—and if you leave me alone I probably will not do any more than has already been done to turn the hand of the law against me; at least, I do not now think I will.

"But, if you continue to pursue me, I shall leave a trail behind me which you will find no difficulty in following, for it will be a trail of dead men and dead women.

"And you, Carter, unless you desist at once, I will kill. Not, perhaps, in the vulgar way—the way that is pursued by common murderers—but by methods of my own, and you have had already sufficient experience with me to conjecture what they may be.

"Therefore, be warned in time. Leave me severely alone, and you will be safe; but attempt to pursue and restrain me, and not only your own life, but the lives of those you hold most dear shall be sacrificed one by one.

"CODMAN."

Nick put the letter in his pocket and stepped into the hall where he found that Stag was now restored to consciousness, although he was still weak and very pale.

"What was it, doctor? What happened?" Nick asked him.

"It was one of those infernal bottles. I smelled of the contents—very carefully, too, or I would be a dead man by now—and it seemed to me that my head had been caught in a vise of red-hot iron. I knew no more until this minute. But I want that bottle, Nick. I want that bottle."

"I am afraid you won't get it, Stag," was the reply.

"Why not?"

"Haven't you been told about the explosion inside the safe?"

"Yes."

"There is not an unbroken bottle left in those shelves, doctor."

"Is that so? Heavens! But if that particular bottle is broken how is it that you did not inhale some of the deadly stuff when you returned to the room?"

"I don't know; only that the windows and the doors are open. The fumes of it may have escaped."

Just at that moment a postman entered the building and gave a bundle of letters into the hand of the superintendent, who was standing near to them, and scowling.

He ran through them rapidly, and presently opened one that was addressed to himself. This he read, and, having done so, he smiled, and then passed it to Nick Carter.

"Read it," he said. "It may interest you."

The detective took the letter and read:

"THOMAS MEAGER, SUPERINTENDENT STONEYHEDGE COURT: If Nick Carter has not already been to my office seeking me, I warn you not to enter my office, which is unlocked, nor to tamper with the safe inside, which is also not locked. There is an infernal machine inside that safe which will explode, and probably wreck the room as well as kill the man who attempts to open the safe within forty-eight hours. After that it will be perfectly harmless.

"If Nick Carter has been there, when you receive this, you will doubtless be already informed concerning it.

"My rent is paid to a year from the first of May, last. I shall never use the offices again, nor anything that is in them. The contents I give to you, with the warning that you had best not monkey with the liquids in the bottles—if any are left. Out of the surplus rent the owners may pay for the damages. If there remains a balance, I give it to you, if you can get it from the owners. CODMAN."

"Stag," said the detective, as he gave the letter back to the man, "are you able to walk?"

"Sure, Nick."

"Then come along with me. There is nothing more to be done here. Officer, you can make your report of this affair to your captain, and tell him that I will also make a report of it at headquarters."

Doctor Stag seemed now to have entirely recovered, and the two were not long in seeking the subway and hurrying down-town.

"What are you going to do now, Nick?" asked the doctor, as they left the train.

"Nothing—just at present."

"Nothing?"

"I am going to sit in my study, close to the telephone, and wait for a message from one of my assistants. That is about all I can do at present."

"I suppose so. Do you think that Codman will loom up in their vicinity?"

"I think it is the most likely place for him to appear, now."

"I'll tell you what I think about it."

"What, doctor?"

"I think that he will light out for some other part of the world. The pace is getting too hot for him here. He will seek fields and pastures new; eh?"

"I don't agree with you."

"No? Why not?"

"It is not his characteristic. He will stay here and fight."

"But why? What would be his object?"

"The man's insensate pride will not let him run away, in the first place; in the second, his conceit is so great that believing he can get the best of me he will remain in this neighborhood to do it."

The doctor shook his head.

"Besides," continued the detective, "Codman now has a serious grievance against me. The events of the last few days have made him hate me. I have penetrated his secret—the secret of the mechanical giant; he will not forgive that."

"Then there is no question about the fact that you are in great danger. I will confess to you that I wouldn't care to have Codman looking for my scalp."

"Well, he hasn't got mine yet; and I do not think he will get it; but, as the case stands just at present, there are four men whom he desires out of the way."

"Four?"

"Yes. Chick, Ten-Ichi, Patsy, and myself."

The automobile came to a stop. Having reached Nick Carter's door, the detective invited Doctor Stag to enter.

Joseph was awaiting him in the front hall, and Nick knew instantly from the expression of his face, that something had happened.

"What is it, Joseph?" he demanded quickly.

"A telephone message, sir, from the little hotel in Morgantown," was the reply. "The proprietor has telephoned to me, not fifteen minutes ago, that Patsy is at the place, badly wounded, and that Chick and Ten-Ichi have disappeared. He says that Patsy thinks they are dead—that Doctor Codman has killed them."

For a moment Nick did not reply. The information had stunned him.

But then, on the instant, he acted.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEAD MAN IN THE DOORWAY.

When the detective arrived at the small, country hotel in Morgantown, which was the nearest place of the kind to that forest into which he had sent his assistants to watch for Codman, Doctor Stag was with him, for he had insisted that the great physician should go there to attend to the wounded Patsy.

They found the lad in a serious condition, indeed.

He had been shot in his left shoulder and had fallen unconscious. Afterward, when consciousness returned to him, he had managed to make his way unaided to the hotel, but the pain of his wound and the great loss of blood that he had sustained, had told severely upon him, so that he was now in a high state of fever.

The doctor simply would not permit Nick to attempt to talk to him, but peremptorily ordered him away.

"I cannot let you say a word to Patsy before to-morrow morning," he told Nick. "I must at once get that bullet out of him, and then we will see—what we will see. You must do the best you can for the present without any aid whatever from him."

Nick descended the stairs and found the proprietor.

"Mr. Shaw," he said, "I wish you would tell me all you know about this affair."

"That will be mighty little, Mr. Carter."

"It is now five o'clock," said Nick. "About how long ago was it when Patsy returned here wounded."

"It was about one o'clock, I think."

"He came, of course, from that direction," and Nick pointed down the road.

"Yes."

"When did you first see him?"

"When he was about thirty rods down the road. I saw at once that something was the matter, and I ran to him and helped him to the house. He fainted away almost as soon as I got him inside; but I gave him brandy and brought him around."

"Now tell me exactly what he said, when he recovered consciousness."

"He asked me to telephone to you at once and tell you that he was here, and wounded, and that he feared that Codman had captured or killed Chick and Ten-Ichi."

"Is that the way he put it? Captured or killed?"

"Yes; although later he expressed the belief that they were dead."

"Was he entirely in his right mind when he said that, or was he wandering a little?"

"I could not say as to that, sir."

"Did he tell you how he happened to have been shot?"

"I asked him who shot him, and he said Codman. Isn't he the man you were after when you were here before, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes."

"And has he escaped again?"

"Yes."

"And, of course, you have reason to think that he is hiding in the forest around here."

"Yes. It strikes me, Shaw, that you are doing the questioning, instead of I."

"I have a reason for it, Mr. Carter."

"Good! What is it?"

"I have lived in this house all my life. My father and grandfather lived here before me and ran this hotel. It has been in the family a hundred and forty years."

"Well, what has that to do with the case in hand?"

"Merely this, sir: That I know every inch of the ground for twenty miles around here, and I might almost say that I know every tree by sight. If you want me to help you find this man you are after, I will be glad to do so."

The detective thrust out his hand and grasped the landlord's.

"Thank you," he said. "You will be invaluable to me. I accept your offer gladly. Now let us get back to Patsy again."

"Yes."

"Did you get any further information out of him?"

"Only in disjointed sentences; but the sentences of it all was that, while they were searching the woods, they

parated. After some time Patsy heard several pistol-shots. He ran in the direction from which they proceeded, and presently stepped out upon a small clearing, or opening, in the woods.

"At the opposite side of the clearing he saw both of his companions lying upon the ground apparently dead—or unconscious, and he started forward toward them.

"Just as he did so, there was another pistol-shot, and he felt the impact of the bullet in his own body.

"When he was conscious again, he crawled to the spot where he had seen his companions lying on the ground, only to find that their bodies were not there.

"After that he managed somehow to find his way here, and that is all that I could get out of him. I doubt if he really knows any more than that about it."

"Where is the automobile?" asked Nick.

"I don't know anything about that, save that it passed here this morning with your three assistants inside."

"Have you a saddle-horse, Mr. Shaw?"

"Two of them."

"Good! Will you go with me?"

"Where to?"

"To look for the automobile, and to find out anything else we can."

"Yes. We haven't much time before dark, however."

"We will make use of such time as we have, then. How soon will you be ready?"

"In ten minutes."

"I will meet you at the front door. In the meantime, I will see how the doctor is getting along with Patsy."

But Doctor Stag scowled at him and sent him away with a gesture, so he returned to the front of the hotel and waited for the horses.

Shaw carried a Winchester rifle across his saddle, and Nick nodded approval when he saw it.

"It might come in handy," said Shaw, noticing the gesture; "and I know how to use it, if it should."

They discovered the automobile after riding a considerable distance. It had been turned into a narrow and rough roadway which led directly into the forest to the left—the same road which Nick Carter had followed on two previous occasions; once when he had gone over it in company with Doctor Codman in person, to his home in a deep ravine beyond where Nick had met with strange experiences, and again when he had gone in search of the poison doctor, to arrest him.*

Just now the machine was only a few rods off the main highway, and it was in perfect order—no doubt it was just as the three assistants had left it when they arrived on the scene that morning.

"How much daylight have we left to us, Shaw?" asked the detective.

"Rather more than an hour," was the reply.

"Good! I have a fancy to go on to the ravine where Codman has a cabin. It is about a mile into these woods. Will you go with me?"

"Sure. Where is the cabin? In the Devil's ravine?"

"Yes. I thought you knew——"

"It is a year since I have been about this place, sir."

"All right. Come on. By the way, that is an appropriate name you have for the ravine."

"Yes. Devil's gulch was the old name for it. Three-fourths of the people who live around here will tell you that it is haunted."

"And they wouldn't be far astray at that," commented Nick. "It is haunted, at the present time, and by a veritable devil, too, although he is a human being. I refer to Codman."

"Yes. I understand."

"He is a fiend if ever there was one."

"You say he has a cabin in the ravine?"

"Yes; it was there where I first saw that mechanical giant of his."

"That what?"

"I had forgotten that we did not tell you about it. He has manufactured a gigantic representation of a man. It is eight feet tall, and is perfectly proportioned. It is operated by a mechanism inside, that I know nothing about. All that I do know it, that he gets inside of the thing and makes it do things just as a man would do them."

"Is that all quite true, Mr. Carter?" Shaw asked doubtfully.

"Quite true. I have seen it."

"I should think the thing would be much too heavy for him to operate."

"It is made of aluminum, and is, therefore, very light. His own weight balances it when he is inside. It is a most ingenious contrivance, though why he should ever have gone to the trouble of contriving it is hard to understand. He is crazy on a certain subject."

They had been riding on along the road through the woods while they were conversing, and, a few moments later, they came out upon the ledge of rock over the ravine where the cabin was located.

"The cabin is down there," said Nick, pointing into the depths below them. "Will you go down with me, or will you remain here and watch the horses?"

"I'll go along with you, if you don't mind. The horses can take care of themselves."

"All right," replied Nick. "Come ahead."

They dismounted, fastened the horses to the trees, and then Nick led the way down the narrow and precipitous path which led to the bottom.

A short distance along the rocky floor of the ravine brought them to the cabin; and, as the detective stepped out in front of it, he started back quickly and seized Shaw by the arm to enjoin silence.

* For previous history of Thomas Codman, read New Nick Carter Weekly.

The door of the cabin stood wide ajar, and, seated directly in the opening, was a huge negro who seemed to be staring with wide-open eyes, directly toward them.

But it was only for a moment that Nick hesitated.

"Do you see what it is, Shaw?" he asked of his companion.

"Yes; a nigger."

"True," said Nick; "but he is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes; come on."

It was the same negro who had served Codman so faithfully at his office in the city, and he was stone dead.

The cause of death was not apparent, for there was no wound upon him anywhere; but there could be no doubt that he had been made a victim of one of Codman's poisons, and that he had been dead some hours.

As the detective approached, he discovered that the dead negro held something in his right hand.

It proved to be a slip of paper, and, as Nick immediately surmised, it was another message intended for him.

Opening it, he read:

"This is the last warning, Carter. I know that you will come here. Take my advice and turn back while yet there is time. I might have left this message in the hand of one of your assistants, but it was too much trouble to bring the body here. The nigger will do. His usefulness is past. He did not know, when he was falling asleep, that it was the long sleep. He has died painlessly.

"But such will not be your fate when I get you in my power, if you do not turn back now. I will give you all the agony I can—and I will have great sport with you if I follow my inclinations. So, be warned in time.

"CODMAN."

"What do you think of that, Shaw?" asked Nick, giving him the note.

"I think," replied the landlord slowly, but emphatically, "that if I were you I would hunt that man down, if it took all the years of my life to do it."

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER'S CLEVER SCHEME.

"I suppose," said Nick, after a short pause, "that it is up to us to bury this poor chap."

"I think," replied Shaw, "that I would leave it for Codman to do. We haven't any use for this cabin, and he probably has. Let him take care of his own dead."

Nick was still scrutinizing with his eyes fixed upon the note, which Shaw had returned to him, and now he said:

"Did you notice what he has written here in regard to my two assistants who are missing? Did you notice that?"

"Certainly."

"What do you make out of it?"

"Simply that he is bluffing."

"Do you really think that?"

"Yes; and I'll tell you why."

"Do so, please."

"I don't know anything about that man except what you have told me, and what I have guessed, but it is my opinion that if either of your assistants was dead at the time he wrote the note, nothing would have been too much trouble for him in the way of bringing the bodies here so that you would find one or both of them, as we have found the nigger."

"There is logic in that, certainly."

"Depend upon it, they are alive, as yet, at least."

"I think so, too. I want to think so."

"Look here, Mr. Carter, do you know what I think?"

"Tell me what it is."

"I think that the man, Codman, is mad—crazy."

"There is no doubt of that in my mind."

"Well, the very fact that he has *not* left the dead body of one of your assistants here to deliver this note suggests something to me."

"What is it?"

"It suggests that he is saving them alive until such time as he can capture you also, and that then he intends to make you all suffer together. That would be a madman's scheme, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

"The only thing about the whole affair that puzzles me is that he permitted Patsy to escape."

"I have thought about that, too," said Nick, "and I think I can explain it."

"How?"

"Codman could not very well carry more than one man's body at a time, could he?"

"No."

"Then we will suppose that Chick and Ten-Ichi were lying on the ground, as Patsy believes he saw them, wounded or dead."

"Yes."

"If they had been dead, or even mortally wounded, Codman would have left them there; he would not have taken the trouble to remove them."

"I agree with you."

"Being slightly wounded by bullets, or having per-

subject to the effects of some poison of his that he has succeeded in throwing over them—which I think is likely—and he being a doctor, he has carried them away, one by one, to doctor them back to life in order that he may later torture them at his leisure, or, what is more likely, use them in one or more of his infernal experiments."

"By Jove, Mr. Carter, I think you have struck it!"

"Doubtless he had to carry them some distance. He took one and then the other; and it was while he had gone with the second one that Patsy revived and made his escape. Don't you see?"

"Yes."

"Otherwise Patsy would at this moment have been a prisoner also."

"Exactly."

"Now, Shaw, let us change the subject for a moment."

"All right."

"What do you know about this ravine? How many secrets has it?"

"Secrets?"

"I mean hiding-places; caves; localities where a man like Codman would not fear pursuit."

"Oh! It is full of them. I used to know every inch of it as a youngster. I haven't been here in years, but I think I can find every one of them, for all that."

"Had the horses had their supper, before we started?"

"Yes; they had just been fed and watered."

"Are you game to stay here with me through the night?"

"You bet your life I am; only we haven't got any light."

"Yes we have. I have got an electric light in my pocket, and, unless Codman has removed it since I was here before, there is another one in this cabin."

"What do you expect to accomplish by remaining here through the night, Mr. Carter?"

"I don't know. I've got a hunch to remain; that's all."

"Then we'll stay."

"Good! Here is that other light. You work it by pressing this button when you want the light and by releasing it when you don't want it. See?"

"Perfectly. Yes."

"Do you think that we left the horses all right for the night?"

"No. I'll go up and lead them back a little way into the woods, and also take off the saddles. I won't be long."

Left alone, Nick seated himself on a fallen tree behind the cabin, where he could not see the staring eyes of the dead negro, and waited for Shaw's return; but he had not long to wait, for almost immediately Shaw was back again, wearing an exceedingly perplexed countenance.

"What is the matter?" asked Nick.

"The horses aren't there," was the reply; and Shaw seated himself on the log beside the detective.

"Not there?" repeatd Nick. "Where are they?"

"Gone. Vamoosed. Escaped. Disappeared. Vanished."

"Did they break loose?" asked the detective.

"Not by a jugful; they were untied."

"You did not attempt to search for them?"

"No; what's the use? It is almost dark now. We have decided to remain here for the night, and so we won't need them till morning; and, besides, it's ten to one that I couldn't have found them, anyhow."

"That's true enough." Nick fell to thinking, and then he added: "Codman is making his presence felt."

"That's what he is," replied Shaw.

"The fact that he knows we are here puts a different light upon our remaining, doesn't it?"

"Decidedly."

"I was hoping that he would be asleep somewhere, as soon as it got late enough, and that we would have the whole night to search around here without the fear of his interfering."

"Well, he knows that we are here, all right."

"Yes; and that is why I said that it put a different light on affairs."

"Yes."

"Instead of searching, we must let him do the searching."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I mean that we must manage to fool him."

"That isn't bad; but how?"

"Come and help me carry the body of that negro out of the house, and I'll show you."

"Where are you going to put it?"

"Anywhere out of our sight. We will bring that bench out of the house, and put it here. We will put the body on the bench and cover it with the canvas sheet he used to throw over the giant when it wasn't in use."

"And then——"

"Then we will make ourselves comfortable inside the cabin—or appear to do so."

"I am afraid I don't understand, Mr. Carter."

"I'll show you; come ahead."

The bench was brought out and set down behind the cabin. Then the body of the dead negro was placed upon it and covered with the canvas sheet which they fastened down securely over it, after which they returned to the interior of the cabin.

Darkness had fallen by the time this was accomplished, and Nick at once closed and securely fastened the door and the shutters of board over the only two windows with which the cabin was provided.

"We'll smother in here," said Shaw.

"We won't be here long enough to smother," replied the detective. "I noticed, when I was here before, that Codman had provided himself with quite a wardrobe."

"Clothes, you mean?"

"Yes; they hang behind that sheet over there."

"What the dev——"

"Watch me."

Nick crossed to the sheet in question, which had been tacked to a frame at the top, so it formed a sort of closet for the reception of clothing, and, pulling it aside, disclosed several suits of clothes.

Two of these he took down from their hooks, after which he returned for the other and began, with these before him, to stuff one pair of trousers, at the same time directing Shaw to do the same with a second pair.

Shaw was beginning to understand now, and he lost no time in complying.

There were two bunks in the cabin, one above the other, and when Nick had completed the stuffing of one of the suits he carried it to one of the bunks and placed it under the blankets.

He took great care in arranging it so that it would appear as if a man were lying asleep under the blanket of the bunk; and then, with an old jacket, he manufactured a fair representation of a man's head, lying with the face to the wall.

"There," he said, studying what he had accomplished. "That will do very well if a light is not thrown directly upon it. Now for yours, Shaw."

"What is it? I see what you are up to now."

"All right."

Nick took the second suit of clothes and arranged it in the corresponding bunk as he had done with the first, and when he had finished the task he stepped back again and surveyed them both with a look of satisfaction.

"I'm hungry, aren't you?" he asked Shaw then.

"Yes; and there seems to be plenty of food here, too."

"Exactly," replied Nick. "We will cook some of it, too; but we won't eat it."

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because if we should do so we would doubtless fall asleep in earnest. Don't you understand? The doctor has left it here purposely, and he has drugged it. If he is watching and waiting anywhere around, he will smell the cooking and will think we have eaten. Then, after a while, when all is quiet, he will think that his drugs have taken effect, and he will make no bones about breaking into the cabin."

"By Jove, Carter! And we——"

"We will be outside, waiting for him to do it; and if all works well, instead of his capturing us, we will capture him. Do you understand now?"

"You bet!"

CHAPTER IX.

AN ESCAPE FROM AN AWFUL FATE.

Together they went through the ceremony of frying bacon and other things, not one of which they dared to eat.

And oh, the smell of it all for two hungry men! It was almost maddening.

But Nick Carter knew the man with whom they had to deal; he knew his subtlety, his craftiness, his unscrupulousness.

There was no doubt whatever in the mind of the detective, since the disappearance of the horses rendered it certain that Codman knew of their presence there, that he had "doctored" every morsel of food that was contained in that cabin, and he was positive that if they should dare to partake of any of it they would be poisoned, or at least rendered unconscious and therefore an easy prey for the madman.

And so the food, when cooked, was thrown into the fire, and at last they extinguished the two lamps they had lighted, and prepared to make their escape from the cabin.

It might be asked why they did not wait inside, and there were two answers to this.

One was that the night was exceedingly warm. There was no ventilation whatever in the cabin with the solid shutters of the windows and the heavy deal door closed.

and Nick knew that the doctor would be suspicious if either the door or the windows should be left open.

The other was that Nick preferred to take the doctor in the rear.

The crafty scoundrel might, before he ventured inside the building, fill the room with one of his infernal drugs, which would suffocate them before they could attempt to resist or attack him, and already Nick's experiences with Codman had been such that he knew discretion to be the better part of valor when he was dealing with him.

"How shall we get outside?" asked Shaw. "Codman is probably on the watch."

"It may be that he is—but, even so, I don't believe that he has stationed himself quite near enough to the cabin to see us when we go out. Will you follow my directions exactly as I give them?"

"Certainly."

"Then lie flat on your belly, close to the casing of the door. I will open it just wide enough for you to crawl out. Keep as flat down as possible and crawl directly forward."

"All right."

"You remember those alders, half a dozen rods directly in front of the cabin?"

"Yes."

"Go there, and wait for me."

"And you? How will you get out and close the door after you without standing up?"

"That is dead easy," replied Nick.

"I don't see how."

"I have found a small gimlet here in the cabin. While you are crawling toward the alders I will bore the gimlet into the door near the bottom far enough so that when I am ready I can pull the door shut and latch it. Then I will remove the gimlet and follow you."

"Gee! I would never have thought of that plan."

"Are you ready now, Shaw?"

"Yes."

"Then go ahead."

Nick opened the door wide enough for Shaw to pass through, and the moment that his companion was clear of the opening he followed him, after quickly making use of the gimlet as he had explained.

Shaw had not covered half the distance to the alders before Nick was following him, and as Nick made better speed than the landlord they arrived at their place of concealment at the same time.

"Gee!" whispered Shaw in the detective's ear, "this is better than staying in that stuffy room with the smell of that bacon in your nose."

"Yes," admitted Nick. "Be silent now."

They were soon to discover that it was well for them that they had not elected to remain inside the cabin while awaiting the arrival of Codman.

Something like half an hour had passed when Nick suddenly gripped his companion's arm.

"He comes," he whispered.

They could see a shadow, blacker than those by which it was surrounded, glide slowly toward the cabin from the direction of the path down the cliff, and it kept steadily moving forward until it came to a stop directly in front of the door, and there its owner seemed to be engaged in performing some noiseless work.

"What in blazes is he up to?" whispered Shaw in Nick's ear.

"Shhh!" admonished the detective. "I don't know."

"Why not make a rush for him now, Carter?" Shaw whispered again.

"No; wait until he enters the house. He would escape us now in the darkness."

"What the devil is he doing?"

"I don't know, I tell you. Reconnoitering, probably."

"He is going a mighty funny way about it, then."

Nick thought so, too, although he did not admit it.

Codman—if it were he—was almost motionless in front of the door, and stood with his back toward them. At the same time, however, he seemed to be engaged in some sort of occupation the significance of which neither of the men could fathom.

They watched him breathlessly for almost a quarter of an hour, when suddenly he left the door and moved to the nearest window.

Here again he occupied himself as he had done at the door, although he was not so long a time about it; and then he moved on to the second and the only remaining window.

It will be remembered that the windows were closed with board shutters, hooked on the inside, so Nick could not fancy what he might be doing there, unless he were listening for sounds from the inside.

Presently he completed his task at the second window, whatever it might have been, and then he turned and glided away in the darkness.

He was gone only a moment when he returned and

[illegible] forward as far as the door he seemed to halt there for a moment, when he again turned away.

But it was only to return a second time, and this time he went so far as one of the windows, paused a moment, and then again disappeared.

He reappeared a third time and went to the remaining window.

This time he barely stopped at all, but passed on around the cabin to the rear.

"What in the name of the devil *is* he up to?" demanded Shaw in a whisper.

"I don't know yet; but I'm guessing," replied Nick.

"Guess for me, won't you?"

"Wait a moment, and if I am right you will see for yourself presently. It is a fortunate thing for us that we did not remain inside the cabin, however."

"Why?"

"Wait and you will see. Hush! There he is again."

It was true.

The shadow appeared around the corner of the building again, and this time Codman went directly to the door, halted there, struck a match and applied the flame to a bundle which was against the door, and which he had deposited there while it was too dark for the watcher to see what he was doing.

It was evident, too, that the contents of the bundle had been soaked with oil, for it blazed up instantly and fiercely; and the instant it did so the incendiary leaped from the door to the first window and again applied a match to a bundle of something that he had placed there.

"Good God!" whispered Shaw. "He has fired the house!"

"Yes," said Nick.

"And he believes that we are asleep inside."

"Yes," said Nick again.

Shaw was now passing to the second window and could be plainly seen in the light of the two fires he had kindled.

He raised his rifle, and in another second Codman's career would have been forever ended had not the detective reached up and stopped him just as he was about to shoot.

"Are you [illegible] the murderer?" whispered Shaw angrily.

"No," replied Nick. "No."

"Why not? Why not? He deserves it!"

"Yes; I admit; but there are three reasons why I would not have you [illegible]."

At that instant Codman disappeared again around the corner of the cabin, and Shaw muttered half aloud:

"Damn your reasons!"

"Don't forget," said Nick quietly, "that he has my two assistants imprisoned somewhere, and that we don't know where. If we killed him now, we might never find them, and if they are wounded and helpless, they might starve to death. Isn't that reason enough, Shaw?"

"Yes. I didn't think of that. Forgive me."

"The second reason is that when that cabin has burned to the ground he will think that I have perished with it. He will, therefore, be just that much easier to capture."

"I had not thought of that either."

"And the third reason is that I particularly wish now, since he has killed that poor negro, to take him alive. You see, I have his confession to that crime in my pocket."

"Right."

"We will have to move back a bit farther among these alders," said Nick. "There is too much light where we are."

"Say, Carter," said Shaw, when they had gained a place of more security, "do you know what that villain has done?"

"Yes; he has set fire to the cabin."

"I should say he had. Why, he has set a dozen fires. He has got them all around the cabin—in front, at the back, and at both ends. Do you realize that?"

"Yes."

"And do you see now what he was doing to the door and to those windows when he puzzled us so?"

"Certainly. He was screwing them fast to the building, so that even if we should awaken, inside, we could not by any possibility get out."

"Did you ever hear of such a fiend as that?"

"Oh, yes. I have known others that were quite as bad as he is."

Suddenly they discontinued their conversation, for at that moment the tall figure of Codman appeared in view again, and he came directly toward them until he was half way between them and the burning cabin.

There he paused, and he stood for a long time with arms folded across his breast, as motionless as a statue, silently regarding the blaze he had kindled.

The entire structure was now enveloped in a mass of flame, and if there had been human beings inside, as Codman supposed there were, they could have had no hope of escape now.

Suddenly Codman moved a little. He raised his right arm, and, in a voice which reached the two watchers, he exclaimed:

"So will perish all who dare oppose me!"

He remained where he was until the roof had fallen in and the door had collapsed; then he passed around the building again, this time on a run, and after a moment he returned, bearing the body of the dead negro in his arms.

Suddenly he made a rush toward the blazing furnace of fire, and, raising the dead body, he cast it from him, with a strength which even Nick Carter did not believe he possessed, straight through the fallen door into the vortex of flame.

Then, with a harsh laugh, he turned away, and before either of the watchers realized it he had disappeared from view.

Nor did he reappear, although Nick and Shaw waited until the fire had died down to a mass of glowing coals.

CHAPTER X.

A BANDIT CHIEFTAIN.

It was long after midnight when Nick and his companion finally abandoned their vigil, being satisfied that Codman would appear no more that night.

"Shaw," said Nick then, "you say that you know every inch of this territory; eh?"

"I do; pretty near it."

"Do you happen to know a short cut from here to your hotel which we could take without going upon the highway at all?"

"I do that. It will take us right behind my barn."

"And about how far is it?"

"Three good miles, I should say."

"How long will it take us to cover it—in the dark?"

"Maybe an hour."

"I want you to stick to me now, Shaw, and see this thing out."

"That's what I intend to do."

"I want your knowledge of this locality."

"I know that."

"And we must not forget one thing."

"What is that?"

"We must not forget that Codman believes that we are dead. Shaw, we must remain dead, for a time."

"Yes; I am onto that. But——"

"Go on. But what?"

"Suppose he should go nosing around there in search of our bodies and not find them? He would be wise, wouldn't he?"

"I don't think it will occur to him to do that. But, anyhow, I propose to capture him before those ruins cool off enough for him to search for our remains."

"Bully."

"And now, Shaw, it is up to you to lead the way to your hotel just as quickly as possible."

"What for?"

"I must find out how Patsy is getting along, for one thing. For another, we must set the minds of Stag and Patsy, as well as those of your own people, at rest concerning us; and, again, I am going to disguise you and myself so that——"

"So that the devil himself wouldn't know us, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Come on, then, if you are ready."

"Quite ready."

It was a quarter to two when they arrived at the hotel and let themselves in by the back way; and it was a quarter past three when they left it again by the same route and glided away through the darkness.

But they had found that Patsy was very much better; they had offset any anxiety that might otherwise have been felt by their non-reappearance; they had arranged that the automobile should be sent for and the horses searched for, and they had provided themselves with a goodly supply of food—enough to last them a couple of days.

And last, but not least, they were so thoroughly disguised that it would have been impossible for any person who knew them to recognize either of them.

Nick had stained Shaw's skin and his own to the hue of an Italian laborer, and with jet black wigs and with clothing such as is usually worn by the laborers of that class they were perfect representations of what they pretended to be.

And much to the detective's surprise and gratification he discovered that Shaw spoke Italian quite well, so as they trudged along the path through the woods toward the ravine they talked together in that tongue.

It was daylight when they arrived again at the ravine where the cabin had been burned, and, following the plan they had agreed upon, they selected a place somewhere in front of the ruins, started a small fire and began imperturbably to prepare their breakfast.

It was Nick Carter's idea that sometime during the day—the forenoon, doubtless—Codman would reappear there, and he wished the wily doctor to discover the two Indians—himself and Shaw—evidently camping out.

For the rest—for what was to happen after that, Nick had determined to let events shape themselves.

One word of caution he gave to Shaw.

"It is more than likely that Codman speaks Italian," he said to him, "and if he does he may discover that yours is not perfect. For that reason you had better pretend to have a serious impediment in your speech. Stutter like sixty, and when you are at loss for a word stop and look appealingly at me. I will appear to help you out. That will fool him nicely."

Luck played into their hands even sooner than Nick had expected, for they had not half finished their meal when the detective raised his eyes to discover that Codman was standing directly in front of them, not fifty feet away, and was regarding them silently.

He had approached without a sound, and he stood with folded arms and with an evil smile upon his sinister, Satanic face.

"Who are you?" he demanded, "and what do you want here?"

Nick leaped to his feet, bowed low, smiled his broadest and most Italian smile, and, paying no attention to the questions that had been asked him, asked in Italian if the stranger would honor them by having something to eat.

The stranger would not, and he said so in Italian as perfect as Nick spoke it himself.

But he drew nearer and seated himself upon a rock that was handy by.

"Who are you two?" he asked again, this time in Italian.

"This," replied Nick, jerking his thumb toward Shaw, "is my cousin, Luigi Caligula; and I am Pietro Lacava; both at your service, signor."

"What are you doing here?" was the next question; and Nick threw out his hands with an expressive shrug of the shoulders as he replied:

"I guess we, signor, we are eating our breakfast."

The doctor frowned.

"But what brought you here?" he demanded.

"The same. We walked. We were not brought," replied Nick, again smiling.

"But the main road is almost two miles from here. How did you happen to wander into this place?"

"The main road, signor," replied Nick, "is not healthy for my cousin and me in the daylight, and therefore we were traversing it in the night. It has been our habit, for the preservation of our good health, to travel by night only. In the night, as we were passing along the road, we saw the light of a fire in the woods. We turned in to find the cause, and behold! we are here."

"What time did you arrive here?"

"In the night. We do not know the time."

"Did you see anybody here, near the burning building?"

"No, signor. It was only a heap of ashes when we arrived."

"You are fleeing from justice, I suppose. Why?"

Again Nick shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"There was a misunderstanding," he explained. "Two of my countrymen were unfortunately killed. Luigi and I were afraid that it might be thought that we killed them."

"I see. Doubtless you *did* kill them; eh?"

Nick only smiled; a smile that meant nothing.

"What is the matter with your cousin that he says nothing? Is he dumb?"

"He has an impediment. He stutters. Luigi, speak to the signor."

Thus abjured, Shaw, after several frightful grimaces, managed to articulate a few words of greeting, after which he subsided into silence again; but Codman seemed satisfied.

"Where were you going?" he asked of Nick again.

"To Boston, where we have acquaintances."

"Have you been followed, do you think?"

"No, signor. That was impossible."

"Do either of you speak any English at all?"

"No, signor. We arrived together, only two weeks ago, in this country."

"It didn't take you long to get into trouble, did it."

"No, signor."

Codman was silent for awhile; and then he said suddenly:

"How would you like to remain in hiding in these woods for a time?"

"It seems like an excellent place in which to hide," replied Nick.

"I can give you employment if you care to stay."

Nick smiled and shrugged again.

"How do we know that the signor would not betray

me?" he demanded, with a glint in his eyes which he knew would please Codman better than anything he could say.

It was Codman's turn to shrug and smile; and he replied:

"I am a fugitive, like yourselves. I wish to gather around me a band of faithful men. I was thinking about it when I suddenly discovered you seated here. Since I have found you, I have decided it would be well if I should have only Italians around me."

"Banditti?" inquired Nick softly.

Codman nodded.

"Si, signor. It would suit both Luigi and me. We are not without experience, although it is perhaps unfortunate that neither of us speak English."

"Not at all. It is rather an advantage."

"So? Have you others with you now?"

"No. I am alone."

"And what is there for banditti to prey upon here? Could we take rich signors for ransom, think you?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"And are there not soldiers to chase us?"

"Bah! No one could ever find us where I hide."

"And one more word, signor."

"Yes?"

"You would be chief: no?"

"Yes."

"What proportion of the gain would be ours?"

"You will divide sixty per cent. between you. I will take the remaining forty."

"That would be well; but when there are others in the band?"

"When there are others a new arrangement will be made."

"And your name, signor? We have told you ours."

"I shall be known only as Captain Satan."

"Ah! Ah! It is a good name. I admire it."

"Is it a bargain, then, Pietro?"

"It is a bargain."

"Then follow me and I will give you something better to eat than that trash you have before you."

"It is well, signor."

"Wait. Luigi has not spoken. What says he?"

"He says as I say, signor."

"All the same, I would rather hear him say it for himself."

"Speak, Luigi," ordered Nick tersely.

Again a succession of frightful grimaces, and at last the words were out.

"Come," said Codman then.

They rose and followed him through the woods, straight up the ravine.

CHAPTER XI.

TWO HOURS MORE TO LIVE.

The detective had not even imagined any such success as this when he decided to return to the ravine disguised as an Italian laborer.

In fact, he had had no definite plan in view, other than that the disguise would enable him to get upon the track of Codman more easily, and that possibly it might secure him an interview with the man.

However, things had turned out much better than he had dared to anticipate, and now here he was, openly following the poisoner and would-be bandit up the glen toward his place of retreat, which Nick began to suspect was so surely hidden away that even Shaw would not have known where to find it with all his boasted knowledge of "every inch" of the territory in that vicinity.

Nick Carter had been up that glen before, accompanied by Ten-Ichi.

On that occasion he had been in pursuit of the mechanical giant which had mysteriously disappeared at the foot of a water-fall, over which it was impossible to climb, behind which it was impossible to hide, and from the vicinity of which there was no possibility of escape without discovery by the pursuers.

And on that occasion Nick and Ten-Ichi had dived through the deep basin of water below the falls and had found their way through a fissure in the rocks below the surface of the water which had brought them to a second land-locked pool, through which their prey had escaped them.

The detective wondered now if Codman were taking them to that same place, and if they would be expected to dive through the pool.

He hoped not, for such a course would be fatal to the disguises that he and Shaw were wearing.

Not that the stain he had used would wash off; it would not. But the stain did not cover their bodies, and the wigs they wore would certainly be disarranged by immersion in the water.

However, no word was spoken between them as they made their way up the glen, with Codman leading the

way, with Nick close behind him, and Shaw bringing up the rear.

It would have been an easy matter then for Nick to have leaped upon Codman's back and so have overcome and captured him; but this he did not do, because he felt it necessary that the doctor should remain at liberty at least until he had led them to the place where he had taken Chick and Ten-Ichi.

Codman kept on straight ahead of them until they came to the falls, and at once Nick's mind was set at rest concerning the pool, for hanging over the brow of the cliff, directly beside the rushing water, was a ladder of rope; and without even so much as looking around at his companions the poisoner began to climb it.

Nick waited until he had arrived at the top, and then he calmly followed, after which he stood waiting until Shaw had joined them.

The detective thought when he climbed over the brow of the cliff and stood upon solid ground—or, rather, solid rock—again that there was a peculiar smile upon the sinister countenance of Doctor Codman, and for one fleeting instant the thought occurred to him that possibly the man had penetrated their disguises and was merely leading them into a trap.

But he dismissed the thought almost as soon as it occurred to him, and as soon as Shaw joined them the journey was taken up again as methodically as before.

They were now in even a wilder part of the glen, although the cliffs were by no means so high.

After traveling some distance farther, Codman turned into a connecting ravine, through which a small stream flowed into the larger one they had been following, and here, presently, a pathway led them to the top of the cliff, thence over a short distance of comparatively level space, and thence down again into a sort of cup which Nature had somehow ground out of the massive hills.

The detective could not do otherwise than admire the wild beauty of the place. Towering and beetling cliffs loomed down upon them from every side, and there seemed to be no means of entrance to, or egress from, the place save by the way they had come; and when Nick glanced toward Shaw he saw at once that the spot was a strange one to him also.

In the very center of this remarkable place, which could not have exceeded fifty feet in diameter, Codman halted. Then he turned and faced them.

"I am about to reveal a secret to you," he said in his perfect Italian. "The secret of our hiding place."

"Si, signor," replied Nick, answering for both.

"I will not ask you to swear never to reveal it, for it will be to your own interests not to do so; but I will say this: If ever I find that either of you have so much as a thought of betraying me or my secrets, my arm is long and my vengeance is sure."

"Si, signor," said Nick again.

A heavy mass of trailing vines hung down over the cliff to the floor of the basin, and now, after uttering the laconic word, "Come!" Codman stepped forward, brushed a mass of the vines aside and passed beyond them.

Instantly Nick followed, as also did Shaw, and as instantly they found themselves at the entrance to a huge cavern, which seemed to extend backward into the hills to unknown depths.

The way before them was broad and high—possibly ten feet in diameter either way, and, after taking a lantern from the wall and lighting it, Codman again led the way forward.

Shaw was saying to himself that this was certainly a new one on him, but Nick Carter could not hear this remark, although he believed such to be the situation.

Nick counted the steps he took as they advanced, for they proceeded in perfect silence. And he counted three hundred, which brought him to the supposition that they had penetrated the mountain to a depth of seven or eight hundred feet before they came to a stop at all.

And here they found themselves in a large chamber, where stalactite and stalagmite gave back irridescent and ghostlike reflection from the light that Codman carried.

There was some rough furniture in the place. There was a rustic table in the center; some blankets were piled in a corner, and there were other necessities scattered about which led the detective to believe that this was what might be termed the living-room of the cavern.

"We have arrived," said Codman; and he proceeded at once to light two lamps that were provided with reflectors. And then, while Nick and Shaw imperturbably produced pipes from their blouses and filled them, he stood silently regarding his two recruits.

"This is our cavern home," he said. "There are many more chambers like this one, and also there are several other entrances besides the one by which we came here."

"That is good, signor," replied Nick, for he saw that he was expected to say something. "I am accustomed to caverns. I have lived in them before."

"After a little while," said Codman, "I will show you more of the cavern. I will conduct you to the other entrances—but just now I have something else to do."

He left them then, without another word, going swiftly away through the darkness without a light, and leaving them in the broad glare of the two lamps he had lighted.

The instant he disappeared Nick wheeled and approached Shaw swiftly.

"Listen," he whispered rapidly. "He will return in one minute to watch us. Do not speak at all save in reply to anything I might say, and then take your cue from me—and don't forget to stutter in Italian."

He passed rapidly on then and began to study the walls of the cavern; and presently, believing that Codman was probably on the watch by that time, he turned and said aloud in Italian to Shaw:

"We have met with great good fortune, Luigi, my cousin."

"Yes," replied Shaw, stuttering frightfully.

"And our new chief—he is sublime! He is fine! He is an ideal!"

"It is so," assented Shaw, occupying almost a minute in saying it.

"And those who seek us for the deaths of Magannini and Sabastiano—they will not find us here! No!"

"No."

"Our fortunes will be made. We will rob the coaches on the highway; we will secure prisoners and hold them for ransom; we will become rich men; and then—Ah!—we will return to Italia. *Bene!!*"

"*Bene!!*" assented Shaw.

"I am sleepy," said Nick. And in truth he was so. "I shall rest."

"And I," said Shaw.

"Again Satan will awaken us when he returns," said Nick, as he threw himself upon a blanket after spreading another one out for Shaw.

It will be remembered that neither of the men had closed their eyes during all of the preceding night, and, in truth, they were both worn out. And so it is not surprising that, feeling perfectly secure, and having no idea that Codman had penetrated their disguises, they speedily dropped asleep.

Just precisely what it was that happened after that the unfortunate pair knew—that is, he did not for a space of several hours; but whether one, or two or more, he could not tell.

He was dimly conscious once, while he slept, of the fact that a man was bending over him; but, although he sought to rouse himself, he could not move his arms or open his eyes.

With Shaw, the period was one of utter blank.

But at last consciousness did return to the detective.

He opened his eyes and looked around him, at first without moving, and he was conscious of the fact that there was now only a dim light in the cavern, and that the figure of a man—of Codman, in fact—was seated not far away from him, and that he was at the moment silently regarding the recumbent figure of Shaw.

Then, instantly, two other startling facts rushed upon his comprehension.

One was that his face was smarting, as if some lotion had been applied to it, and the other was that his wig was gone.

Instantly he realized that Codman had found them out. And with the realization came the added knowledge that he was chained to the floor of the cavern, with an iron collar around his neck. His hands and feet were free, but he could not have raised his head six inches from the floor had he tried to do so.

But he did not make the attempt. Instead, he closed his eyes again, preferring to keep Codman in ignorance of the fact that consciousness had returned to him.

But it was not so with Shaw. He had not the forethought that Nick Carter possessed, and after a little Nick heard him exclaim:

"What the dev——!" And following it came a low laugh from the poisoner.

"How is the worthy landlord of the Morgantown Inn, to-day?" he heard Codman inquire ironically. "Well, I hope. Your friend, Nick Carter, seems to have slept more soundly than you. He has not awakened."

"Humph!" replied Shaw. "So you have found us out, have you?"

"Found you out? I knew you both, instantly, the moment I saw you, down there by the burned cabin."

"I think you are a liar," said Shaw coolly; "but I don't know as it makes any difference under the circumstances."

"No, my friend. You are quite right. It makes no difference under the circumstances. And these circumstances are going to be very serious ones for you two."

"Yes?" drawled Shaw. And Nick could have patted him on the back for his coolness. "Go away—do! I am

very tired and sleepy, and you make me more tired. You are worse than a blow-fly with your infernal buzzing."

Codman rose and stood for a moment looking down upon them both. Then he said:

"When Nick Carter wakes up, tell him for me that you have each just two hours to live. I shall return at the end of that time, and I shall put you at once to death. How, does not matter. You cannot hope to escape, for your necks are chained to the rocks, and I have removed everything from your pockets. That was a very pretty game you played, and it might have worked if you had kept awake."

With that, he was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAGEDY AT HELL'S BROTH.

The detective noticed with satisfaction that Codman went toward the direction of the entrance to the cavern when he departed, and as soon as he believed him to be out of hearing he spoke to Shaw.

"We seem to have gotten ourselves into a pickle, Shaw," he said.

"Hello! You're awake, are you? Yes, it does look that way."

"Codman means what he says, too."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"How are you located, Shaw?"

"I am anchored to a rock, with an iron collar around my neck. How is it with you?"

"Same here."

"We've got two hours in which to make some effort to get loose, Carter."

"Yes; that is what he said, but it may be only fifteen minutes, and again it might be that many days. You can't tell much about what Codman intends to do."

"I don't feel as if I could break this chain and collar in fifteen years," said Shaw. "Do you?"

"Hardly. However, we will try. I suppose when he captured me I must have been given an examination to see if I was worth the trouble. That was a bad move of ours, going to sleep."

"Yes, but it cannot be helped now."

"But more than I brought you into this thing, Shaw."

"Quit that! We have got located other visitors in my place. You won't see me there, Carter."

"I'm sure of that."

"And something tells me that we are going to get out of this, too."

"All right. I—hark! What is that? Don't you hear a noise?"

"Yes. It sounds as if somebody was creeping toward us—or some animal, perhaps."

"Hello, there!" called Nick loudly.

Instantly there came a reply, and there was joy in the voice that uttered it, too.

"Nick! *Nick!* NICK!" came the voice; and the detective recognized it at once as Chick's.

"Chick!" he replied. "Where are you?"

"Here. I'm coming as fast as I can. He said you were here. I am very weak, but—wait. I must save what strength I have."

It was a long time after that—indeed, it seemed hours, although it was really only minutes—before Chick was close enough to the detective to touch him. And then he put two articles into Nick's hands. One of them was a short, heavy iron bar; the other was a small but sharp file.

"I found the bar after I got loose," he said. "I thought perhaps you could pry the iron staple from the floor with it. If not, you can do as I did and use the file, although it will take a long time to do it. I found the file in the dust where I was chained. Providence must have placed it there for me to find."

"Where is Ten-Ichi?" asked Nick.

"There. Where I was. He is chained to the floor. I came to find you as soon as I was at liberty to do so. I was too weak to attempt to help Ten-Ichi. He told me to find you."

"Good! Now, Chick, can you find that staple, near the back of my head?"

"Yes."

"See if you can force that bar through it. Will it go?"

"Yes."

"Now, you move that collar around my neck as I turn over. I think I can do it. So. That's right. Now use what strength you have in assisting me to my knees. After that I will be able to get a purchase on the bar. So. How far through have you got the bar?"

"About four inches, Nick."

"Good! Now help me to get my hands on it, and you turn around and get your feet against it. There. Now pull, Chick. Now, are you ready? One, two, three, pull!"

It was then if ever that Nick Carter's great strength stood for him.

The staple gave—slowly at first, then more, and at last, with a pop, it came loose from the floor, and the detective leaped to his feet. The iron collar was still around his neck, and there were six inches of chain hanging to it, but he was free.

Instantly he seized the bar again and leaped to Shaw's side, and in another two minutes the landlord was also on his feet.

"Come!" said Nick then. "Show us the way to Ten-Ichi, Chick."

They passed fifty feet or more through a narrow corridor into another chamber of the cavern, where they found Ten-Ichi, chained in the same manner, and here it required the united strength of Shaw and the detective to move the staple.

But it was accomplished.

"And now," said the detective, seizing a lamp from the wall, "let us see if we can find our weapons."

But although they searched that part of the cavern thoroughly, and consumed as much time as they dared, they could find no trace of them, and at last Nick ordered a return to the entrance to the cavern, where he said they would await the return of Codman.

"What is the matter with you, Chick? And of Ten-Ichi?" asked Nick. "You do not seem to be wounded."

"No; we are not wounded. It is Codman's drugs. I am as weak as a rat, and so is Ten-Ichi."

"Well, I'm not. Neither is Shaw. We will wait at the entrance to the cavern and tackle Codman when he returns—if he ever does. It may be that he left us there to starve and did not intend to return at all."

They made their way slowly to the entrance, and, having taken up their positions, waited with what patience they could for the return of the poisoner.

They had waited more than an hour, and Shaw, forgetting the caution that had been given him to remain silent, had just remarked that he had begun to believe that Codman did not intend to return at all when they were all startled by a "Ho! ho! ho!!" from the depths of the cavern behind them. The laughter was followed instantly by two pistol-shots, and two bullets whistled ominously close to their heads.

At the same instant Nick leaped toward the sounds, regardless of the consequences, and he was closely followed by the landlord. Chick and Ten-Ichi remained where they were.

Ahead of them, Nick and Shaw could hear Codman retreating through the darkness. Now and then he turned and sent a bullet crashing through the cavern, but Nick and his companion kept doggedly on.

There was no light to guide them; only the sound of Codman's running feet as he fled from them.

But that was sufficient to guide them, and if they could not make rapid progress, neither could the man they were pursuing.

An interminable distance that run seemed to the detective, and his face and hands were bleeding from contact with the rocky walls, when at last they saw a glimmer of light ahead of them which was, a moment later, blotted out for an instant as the form of Codman passed through it and so into the open daylight beyond.

Nick increased his speed now. He bounded forward and rushed out of the cavern to find himself upon the precipitous side of a mountain—or rather a hill—and to see Codman, twenty rods away, running with all the speed he could command toward the ridge of the hill.

If Nick had possessed a pistol then, he could have stopped Codman with a bullet in the leg; but as it was he could only make an effort to increase his own speed in order to overtake and capture the fugitive.

At the crest of the hill Codman turned and fired again, but the shot went wild, and Nick did not slacken his pace. And then Codman disappeared.

But when Nick reached the top of the hill he saw Codman again. He saw also that the doctor was running directly toward the edge of a precipice which formed one side of a deep gulf in the mountains.

Nick saw him arrive at the very edge of the precipice; he saw him turn and wave his hand mockingly; he saw him turn, then, and raise his hands above his head after the manner of a person who is about to dive; and then he saw him leap outward into the gulf and disappear, head downward, like an arrow sprung from a bow.

In another moment he was at the edge of the abyss himself, and gazing down into the depths below him, and presently Shaw was at his side.

Below them, at a distance of sixty or more feet, was a round, black pool of water which appeared to be swirling round and round with almost the speed of an electric fan. It was perhaps thirty feet in diameter, and the water seemed to rise and then fall again inside the huge, well-like hole it had worn in the rocks during the ages of its agitation.

"Did he dive into that hole?" gasped Shaw.

"Yes," said Nick. "He did."

"Then our chase is ended. Come away, Carter." He shuddered as he said it.

"Why?" asked Nick. "What is it? What is this place?"

"That hole there? It is bottomless. It is called Hell's Broth. Nothing that falls into it is ever seen again. Even a cork is sucked down and disappears. Some scientists who once visited it said that it is caused by an underground river. I don't know as to that. In that well-like hole the water rises and falls again twenty feet every sixty seconds. Come. Let us get away. The career of Doctor Codman, the poisoner, is forever ended now."

"Yes," said Nick, looking down at the black and swirling pool, "I think it is."

That evening they were all back again under the hospitable roof of Moggantown Inn, where they found that Patsy was so much better that Doctor Stag had returned to the city, leaving him in the care of the local physician.

"Codman is dead," said Ten-Ichi to his chief, "but there is one more thing that I would like to accomplish, if you will let me remain up here for awhile with Patsy."

"Sure," replied Nick. "I intended that you should stay with Patsy, anyhow. But what is it that you wish to do?"

"I want to search for and find that mechanical giant," was the reply.

"All right. You have my permission; only it is my own belief that Codman destroyed it."

"Perhaps," admitted Ten-Ichi. "But if he did not, I'll find it, chief."

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 516, will be entitled "The Mechanical Giant; Or, Nick Carter's Assistant. Ten-Ichi Plays a Lone Hand."

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